

5th International Conference EDU-WORLD 2012 - Education Facing Contemporary World
Issues

University trainers' key competencies- a global profile

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Abstract

Training of trainers based on basic competencies has grown in the U.S.A. in the '60s and '70s, considered to be "the most effective way to prepare teachers", which specifically consider them to achieve the minimum level of performance in teaching activities. Towards the end of the century, training of trainers based on competencies had a practical importance, since, gaining experience in teaching, the trainer, generally, and the university trainer, especially, will be able to build those skills necessary for the profession which chose it. Thus, as unable to form the necessary competencies to practice his profession, educator / trainer will improve its work, managing to achieve quality work and contribute to improving the educational system. We will try to see, based on the literature investigation if the most important competencies for teachers are psycho-pedagogically and psycho-relational ones, which highlights the need to establish partnership relations with students, effective communication and to empathize with them, but, in the same time, to be open to student suggestions in order to improve educational approach. Specialized competencies could take the second place in the hierarchy of the teaching necessary competencies, although a lot of students consider that a university teacher need to be a good specialist in order to help them to be good professionals.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of the University of Pitesti, Romania

Keywords: key competences, higher education, university trainer profile, performance;

1. Competence-definition and structure

The finalities of education change very quickly depending on the demands of the society. These demands directly affect educational system. Teachers are responsible for students' education, for the development of research and these are reasons why they need efficient professional competencies. Higher education institutions, universities and academies should provide continuously professional development of teachers to achieve competencies required because „teachers are left with little professional support for nourishing their own sense of being as knowing, thinking, acting, feeling, and striving individuals”. [1]

Training of teachers in terms of competencies begins to take shape in the late '60s, the U.S., following directions which outline the importance of professional development in order to ensure a quality education to students and to help them to perform better. Even in 1986, the view that initial training is sufficient to be a competent educator proves to be not only outdated, but also erroneous. The idea which began to take shape was the need for continuous training both professional and especially pedagogical, which was ignored until the 90s.

Teachers must develop their knowledge, skills and values to improve teaching styles. Many of studies on teachers' competencies focus on the teaching role exercised in classroom rather than teachers' competencies. Teachers' competencies must be redefined depending on the society needs and European directions.

Competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. [2]

Another definition says that competencies consist of a description of the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours required for effective performance of a real-world task or activity. These activities may be related to any domain of life, though have typically been linked to the field of work and to social survival in a new environment. [3]

As we can see, the authors of these definitions put a special accent on the pedagogical and psychological competencies based on the assumption that it is necessary to establish a formal relationship between university teacher and his students because they need to acquire new knowledge, competencies to ensure their performance and success as individuals, as members of the community.

The structure of the competence is extremely complex, which means that it must be developed in time, with involvement from others (mass- media, cultural institution, so on) and with financial support from national authority and not only.

2. A teacher competencies profile

As we establish, the society, generally, and the universities, especially, must develop teachers who are able to assume greater responsibilities as they are at the forefront of educating children, so, a teacher must be a competent in his field. After studying the literature, we find some common element of the professional competence: to possess knowledge, skills and values from the Psychology, Pedagogy and Management fields, developed through theory and practice.

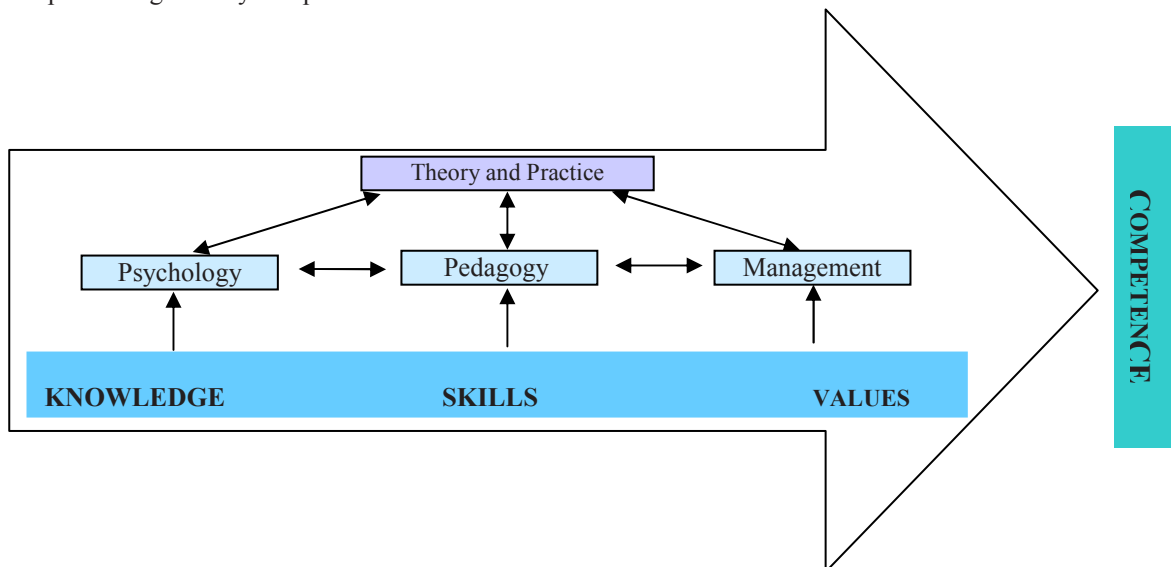


Figure 1 - Structure of the competence

But we are wondering if it is enough to possess knowledge from psychology, pedagogy and management field to ensure a higher quality of education.

Selvi [4] realized a study regarding the professional competencies of English Language Teachers and revealed other competencies than those listed below:

- *field competencies* are strictly related by "what should school teach?" So, it is important to know exactly the content that the teacher and students will study.
- *research competencies* include the competencies of research methods and techniques, designing and carrying out research about education fields.
- *curriculum competencies* must be divided into two sub-competencies as curriculum development competencies and curriculum implementation competencies
- *lifelong learning competencies* include the abilities of learning to learn, and teachers' responsibilities of their own professional development
- *social-cultural competencies* include the knowledge about social-cultural background of students and teachers, local, national and international values, democracy and human rights issues, team and collaborative work with others, and social studies. All of them promote the learning.
- *emotional competencies* are composed of teachers' and students' values, morals, beliefs, attitudes, anxieties, motivation, empathy and so on.
- *communication competencies* include communication models, interaction among teachers, students, social environment and learning topics.
- *information and communication technologies-ICT competencies* are based on using tools and technical equipments for the reaching, disturbing and transferring the knowledge.
- *environmental competencies* are defined as competencies for ecological and environmental safety.

From Selvi's perspective, professionalism of a teacher means to use all these competencies and to be able to "apply" them when some educational situations ask for one or other. It is interesting to see that the most important competency for him is to be a good specialist, even if the educational policies put an important accent on the relational competency because a teacher must be seen as a mediator of student learning, not just a good specialist of his field of knowledge.

But a teacher is not a sum of competencies, he has to originally combine them in order to proof that he is a good professional, oriented through his own success but through students' success too; he has to show his humanity in his relationship with students, colleagues and other peoples.

From a totally different perspective, Cochran and Lekies [5] establish a set of skills useful for every person who wants to obtain success in the knowledge economy which is in a continuously growing:

- *thinking skills* - critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and innovation.
- *communication skills* seen as the ability to communicate effectively using the range of methods and tools available in today's environment.
- *teamwork and leadership skills* means to work effectively in a team and to provide leadership
- *lifelong learning and self-direction skills*: improve skills through mentoring, training, formal education, or other learning activities.
- *technology adoption and application* : using appropriate technology to accomplish a given task and solving problems with technology.
- *professionalism and ethics*: punctuality, time management, ethical behaviour.

As we can see, Selvi, but also Cochran and Lekies considers that, for a teacher, is extremely important to achieve lifelong learning competencies because these are transferable in different contents and could help in achieving other, more appropriate to the educational field. But, it is necessary for every educator from university to believe in the "lifelong learning" concept if he wants to be performing as a teacher, as a researcher and as a manager; that means to effectively participate on every development program which will help him to be better, to acquire different skills and to change his old attitudes regarding the teaching and learning process because the difference between a trained teacher and an untrained one consists in using the latest knowledge, methods and techniques when he is teaching and, in the same time, to use the newest research techniques.

In a study realized in 2009, Turturean M. [6] established a set of 10 competencies of university teacher, a slightly different from those described by Selvi or those described by Cochran and Lekies :

- *cultural competence*-teacher must possess basic information from the all knowledge field;
- *scientific competence*-teacher as an expert in his knowledge field;
- *technique competence*-using the IT to facilitate the student' learning;
- *moral competence*- model for his students, possessing high moral qualities;
- *affective competence*-increasing learning motivation of students; creating a favourable learning environment;
- *artistic competence*-using the nonverbal and paraverbal to captivate students, to maintain his attention;
- *intercultural competence*-include the abilities of communication with students from different environments, religion, culture, so on;
- *psychological competence*-to adapt the knowledge to them particularities, to establish why students learn and why not, so on;
- *pedagogical competence*-teacher must use the best methods and techniques to help student to understand better , to realize an objective evaluation;
- *psychorelational competence*-teachers as partner which help students to obtain performance.

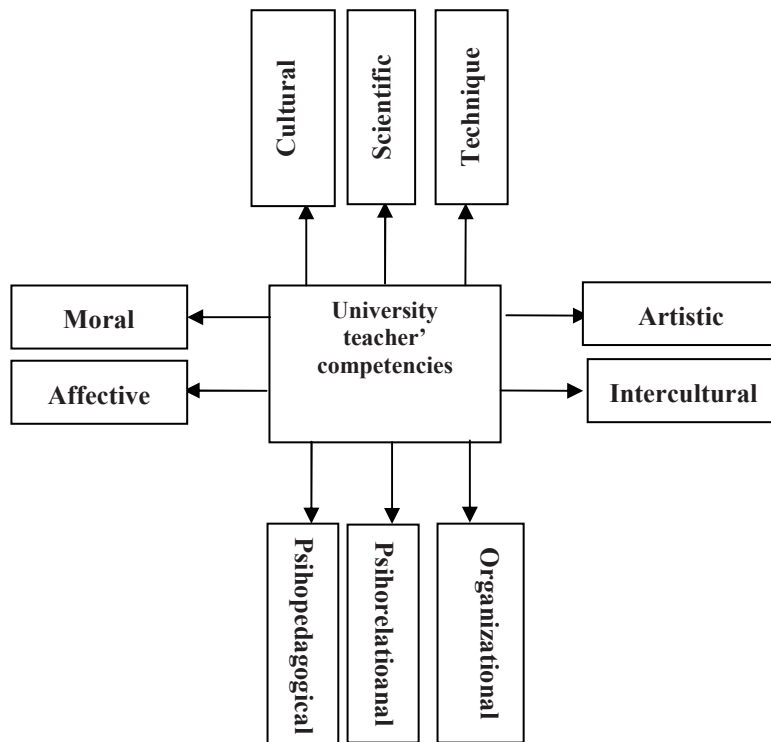


Figure 2 - The teacher's competencies profile (Turturean, 2009, p. 223)

Conclusions

Initial training of teachers for achieving basic competencies required by the teaching profession is gradually, by proceeding sequentially, after a certain pedagogical logic, the educational programs organized as a psycho-pedagogical module that includes the following disciplines: psychology of education, general pedagogy, teaching specialized disciplines, sociology of education, classroom management, computer assisted instruction, teaching

practice. General pedagogy module is therefore only part of an initial training program for future teachers. It aims, in our opinion, formation of professional attitudes and creation of necessary guidance for the training of competencies required by the teaching profession.

A continuous development of university and pre-university teachers is one of the main directions that focus educational services made by the Teacher Training Departments from Romanian universities and beyond. This means to create programs to satisfy the training needs of teachers from higher education and pre-university education (teachers, schoolmasters, teachers, educators) through out them professional career.

Therefore, we believe that these aspects are very important:

- outlining the principles that lead to change of mentality among academics about the need for training;
- constructive and direct participation, in their own training, unconditional by the various educational policies instituted on local, national or European level;
- linking new information with existing knowledge in order to perpetuate, to revolutionize science and research in various areas of specialty;
- structuring strategies of pedagogical training according to adult characteristics, previously identified and developed in an appropriate manner;
- capitalization of interest in training the academic trainers of the opportunities offered by the computer (internet, specialized programs, etc.).
- uptake by them different patterns to structure content, and to manage the teaching and assessment activities.

We can say that continuous training and development needs of university teachers are multiple and complex, helping to build academic competencies necessary for them profession, but at the same time, they have the resources to participate in classes, activities and to train undergraduates students to develop these competencies.

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